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Introduction

Published between 2000 and 2002, these three books provide critical information spanning 2000 years of Inuit life and adaptation to Arctic conditions. All three are original manuscripts, in the one case, translated and re-edited (*Where the Echo Began*) and in the others, edited and published for the first time following their authors' passing (*Deering and Nunguvik*). *Where the Echo began* conveys through stories and ethnographic descriptions Cup'ik and Yup'ik ways of life during the 1930s respectively on Nunivak Island and on mainland southwestern Alaska (Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta

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region). It provides words for social meanings of objects and people's activities. *Deering* describes the material culture of a large Ipiutak feature in northwestern Alaska where preservation of organic materials has rarely been equaled in this part of the Arctic and for this time period (ca. AD 600-700); *Nunguvik et Saatut* reports on the archaeology of the Dorset culture (ca. 500 BC to AD 1000) in northern Baffin Island, Eastern Arctic, from two sites which, like Deering, are characterized by a remarkable amount of organic remains. The preservation of what are usually un-recovered objects provides us with a window into unknown or only imagined activities and technical knowledge and reflects a rare image of life in these regions during the first millennium AD.

Where the echo began

Where the echo began is comprised of several texts written by Hans Himmelheber, translated from German to English by Kurt and Ester Vit, and edited and commented by Ann Fienup-Riordan. The longest of Himmelheber's text, "The frozen path" (1951), is a series of stories he recorded in 1936-1937 among the Cupiit of Nunivak Island and the Yupiit of the Lower Kuskokwim River during his nine month visit in the region. "Ethnographic notes on the Nunivak Eskimos" (1980) consists of Himmelheber's observations of Cup'ik activities and ceremonies during the five months he lived on the island. "Noseblood as Adhesive Material for Color Paint among the Eskimos" (1968) provides a scientific explanation of the mixture of blood and urine in pigments used for painting on wood and skin. And "Unimaginable miracles in the poetry of Western Africa and the Eskimos" (1957) is a short essay in which he discusses the use of miracles in tales from Africa, Alaska and Germany.

The volume is beautifully illustrated with original black and white photographs by Himmelheber himself. Many previously unpublished were printed by photographer James Barker from the original negatives. Himmelheber's texts are introduced by Ann Fienup-Riordan who analyzes his writings and discusses their scholarly and ethnographic importance. Indeed, Himmelheber provides a glimpse into Cup'ik life, ceremonies and rituals on Nunivak at a time just before the influence of the Evangelical Covenant church. The richness of Himmelheber's observations is due in part to his active participation in most of the ceremonies he describes but also to his unique perspective on art and people. As an art historian mostly specialized in African art, his interest was in the artists producing the art and the contexts in which it was produced as much as the art itself. He saw art as a narrative process with stories giving full meaning to art objects. His approach to the study of art, relatively unusual for his time, is well reflected in one of his major works, *Eskimo Artists* (1993), a book Ann Fienup-Riordan was also instrumental in making accessible to an English speaking audience. Fienup-Riordan sets Himmelheber's writings in today's perspective and discusses the question of narratives and their role as a teaching device and a way to experience life in Yup'ik/Cup'ik societies. By hearing the stories, children and people in the community learned about the land and its landmarks, proper behaviors, historical events, etc., in other words about cultural values and heritage. The role of story telling and the power

of narratives in Yup'ik and other cultures has been the object of several analyses (Cusack-McVeigh 2004; Morrow and Schneider 1995).

Himmelheber arranges the stories in thematic categories (Creation stories, Myths, Animal stories, People's stories, Ancestor's stories) which do not reflect Yup'ik or Cup'ik categories. Fienup-Riordan, and Himmelheber himself, warn that the Frozen Path was written for a 1950s German audience. This led him to add titles to each story, something a Yup'ik story teller would never do. The question of the language in which the original stories were recorded and transcribed is addressed briefly in the introduction and more extensively in the last chapter of the book. Fienup-Riordan tells us that "unfortunately, the process of translation has erased many rhetorical characteristics peculiar to individual narrators that probably marked the originals," (p. xxxi) but that, as much as he could, Himmelheber retained the Cup'ik/Yup'ik way of telling the story, keeping for example the effect of repetition. In his own introduction, Himmelheber explains that as a non-Yup'ik speaker, he was able to record the stories thanks to a few English speakers in Mekoryuk, one of the two main settlements on Nunivak. He would first phonetically record/transcribe what he heard in Cup'ik/Yup'ik and then translate each word in German based on what his translator was explaining to him in English. Despite the obvious care with which each intermediary worked on the stories, one nevertheless wonders about how much of the original meaning has been lost in this process of repeated translations and interpretations: from Yup'ik to English to German and then back to English some 60 years later. We learn in the last chapter that in fact, Himmelheber's original phonetic transcriptions and German translations were destroyed during World War II and thus could not be used in the present edition. This last chapter contains critical information about the place of the Cup'ik dialect within the Central Alaskan Yup'ik language and about the transcription process. However, its position at the very end of the book makes it easy to miss and as one and only criticism, I think it should have been placed earlier as a natural follow-up to the introduction.

Many black and white photos and descriptions provide information about the technological knowledge and skills of Yup'ik and Cup'ik carvers and artists. Himmelheber has rare pictures and descriptions of individuals carving a mask for a ceremony; making a bentwood bucket; splitting *unarciaq* (the straight grain spruce wood) with wood wedges; producing fire with the fire drill; carving a story knife; or performing technical acts that a few carvers still perform today with identical tools: the adze and the crooked knife. Through these images and narratives, the reader perceives the role and importance of wood in this treeless environment. Himmelheber actually acknowledges "the valuable present" (p. 4), people of Nunivak Island and of the lower Kuskokwim get from upriver in the interior: strands of driftwood that are carried by the river every spring and give the Yup'ik plenty of raw material to work with. What Himmelheber demonstrates through his writings and photographs is the extent to which the activities he describes—ceremonial, spiritual, technical, and even those related to personal hygiene—form a coherent whole and are highly interlocked. One of the best examples is the sweat bath which was not only important in terms of social relations

and rituals (see also Hensel 1996) but was also technologically critical in fixing the paint on bowls or in curing some of the wood pieces.

Deering: A men's house from Seward Peninsula

Deering: A men's house from Seward Peninsula provides archaeological evidence that men's houses and potentially sweat baths have been around for more than 1000 years. The manuscript, written by Helge Larsen, was edited by Martin Appelt. Arctic archaeologist Helge Larsen does not need much introduction. A pioneer in his field, he and Froelich Rainey are responsible for the excavation of the Ipiutak type site at Point Hope, across and north of Kotzebue Sound (Larsen and Rainey 1948). The site of Deering is located on the north coast of Seward Peninsula or the south shore of Kotzebue Sound, close to the southern limit of the "Ipiutak realm" (Mason 1998, 2006). While travelling with Charles Lucier in 1949, Larsen was unexpectedly shown the Ipiutak and Thule features in the village of Deering and excavations of the main Ipiutak mound took place the following years. In fact, the actual village of Deering sits atop a large archaeological site which comprises an Ipiutak village and cemetery as well as several early Thule and late prehistoric features. Some of these were excavated in the mid to late 1990s when a sewage and safe water project for the village uncovered new deposits (Bowers 2006; Bowers et al. 1999; Reanier et al. 1998) which led to the discovery of a funerary mask similar to the one found in Point Hope (Steinacher 1998).

The structure described in Larsen's report is a remarkably large communal or men's house, referred to as a *qarigi*, which measured nearly 13 m long by 10 m wide. Apart from its imposing size, the feature stands out by the level and quality of its organic preservation, which is unique in Alaska for this time period. Over the years, a series of dates has been run on various materials showing that bone, wood, leather, grass, etc., were kept frozen in the ground for the last 1200 to 1400 years. Consequently, we gain remarkable information on the technological skills of the Ipiutak people which, until then, had been known mostly from lithics and some bone remains. Ipiutak people were heavy wood users. Froelich Rainey (1941) had previously hypothesized their appetite for wood based on the presence of abundant charcoals in open hearths at Point Hope. Nevertheless, the artifacts and the architectural remains at Deering are striking by the quantity as well as overall quality of the wood put into use. This leads to the question of its availability and accessibility. The large architectural construction includes logs that were up to 13 m long and 40 cm in diameter. These logs were so massive that Larsen interprets as handles the notches carved along the length of some of the largest. Trees of these sizes could be found up the Kobuk River across Kotzebue Sound but were probably obtained from driftwood supplies along the coast. Considering their dimensions and what we know today of the occurrence of large unbroken driftwood logs, the procurement of a sufficient number of these to build such structures may have taken years, unless exceptional climatic conditions allowed for a rapid and unusual deposition. Larsen proposes a reconstruction of what the *qarigi* may

have looked like based on his excavation and some ethnographic examples of large community houses.

In terms of artifact description, Larsen follows the relatively classic functional classes, but he also offers convincing analysis and reconstruction of some specific implements such as the sled and snowshoes. These items and others (the functions of which remain unknown) show the use and perfect command of mortising technology to join for example stanchions and even cross pieces to the main frame of an implement. Less convincing on the other hand, is Larsen's section on hunting bows and their "interior" connection based mainly on small bone objects interpreted as hand-guards as in Athapascan bows. Larsen feels the Ipiutak are related to interior populations and tends to lead his data in this direction. His descriptions are detailed and in many instances he provides wood species in their vernacular names (willow, birch or spruce). Unfortunately, he does not specify whether these identifications are based on naked eye or microscopic observations. The manuscript ends abruptly and the last two plates, one of which with lashing threads and roots, are not described. Three appendices provide succinct information about the faunal analysis, the radiocarbon dating and the spatial distribution of the artifacts. The section on radiocarbon dating is a bit unclear and there is some discrepancies between the text and the tables. Finally, one may regret that Larsen's contribution is not put into today's perspective on the Ipiutak culture since he did not have time to provide a concluding statement. It seems it was the intention of the editor to publish "as is" Larsen's last contribution to Arctic Prehistory.

Nunguvik et Saatut

Nunguvik et Saatut, sites paléoeskimaux [sic] de Navy Board Inlet, île de Baffin, an original manuscript written in French by priest and archaeologist Father Guy Mary-Rousselière, is accompanied by an unsigned preface in French and English and a postface (in English only) by Patricia Sutherland who has re-initiated Dorset culture research at Nunguvik and in the region. Born in France and ordained Oblate of Mary Immaculate in 1937, Mary-Rousselière lived and worked in northern Subarctic and Arctic Native communities for 56 years, from the time he was sent as a missionary in 1938 until his tragic death in 1994. It was on Baffin Island and more precisely in Pond Inlet that he spent most of his life. The house fire that killed him, took with him a large part of his writings, field notes, recordings and local genealogy work he had conducted over the course of his life in the region. This event was a great loss both for the Pond Inlet and the Arctic anthropology communities. The Canadian Museum of Civilization publishes here the manuscript that was in preparation at the time of his death.

Often described as an amateur archaeologist—and the preface surprisingly reiterates this notion—Mary-Rousselière was yet a true anthropologist and scholar. His interest in archaeology came early on in his life as he was influenced by a tradition of priest archaeologists like l'Abbé Breuil. He earned a degree in Philosophy from the Seminar of St. Sulpice in Paris (1931) and later, in the 1950s, an M.A. degree in Anthropology from the Université de Montréal (Gordon 1994). Rather than being *la*

quintessence de l'archéologue amateur ('the quintessence of avocational archaeologist'), Mary-Rousselière was a highly qualified, if non professional, archaeologist. He was greatly influenced by French prehistorian André Leroi-Gourhan whom he kept informed of his work. At the same time, he was in contact and maintained an on-going dialogue with Arctic archaeologists such as Meldgaard, with whom he had worked in Greenland, Rowley and Maxwell. His discussion of the chronological position of each house feature shows the level of his understanding of his own field and methods. Contrary to what is suggested in the preface, Leroi-Gourhan, author of *Archéologie du Pacifique Nord* (1946) but better known for his work at Magdalenian sites in France, sustained a great interest in Arctic prehistory, the cultural development of the North, Dorset culture, and the sites Mary-Rousselière was excavating. However, as Mary-Rousselière explains, the work and obligation of the French prehistorian prevented him from ever visiting Nunguvik. This influence of Leroi-Gourhan is felt throughout the manuscript: in what is perceivable of the excavation techniques; in the detailed artifact descriptions that are so concerned with technological aspects of the tools; in the numerous scientific analysis of hair and thread, mercury levels from human hair, nail traces in wood and dog mandible, which ultimately help determine the technological knowledge and extend our understanding of Dorset cultural tradition. And it happens that the remarkable preservation of wood and organic remains at Nunguvik and Saatut provides a much larger and complete vision of the Dorset techno-cultural tradition than what was known before.

A large part of Mary-Rousselière's interpretations and knowledge also came from the people of Pond Inlet themselves who, for over 20 years, participated and assisted him during summer excavations. Not only did he involve the community in archaeological research but he himself was involved in the community. From living and working year round in the Eastern Arctic, and from the oral history work he conducted throughout the years, he gained an intimate knowledge and understanding of the land and the people of the region, which is strongly felt in his description of the two Dorset sites.

Nunguvik and Saatut are no usual sites. As mentioned above, the level of preservation of organic material, and of wood in particular, is such that Mary-Rousselière states that, in House 73, once down to 35 cm below surface, wood implements become more numerous than lithics or bone artifacts. His description provides a glimpse into the complexity of the Dorset culture. Apart from the abundance of anthro- and zoomorphic carvings, some of which are complex articulated figurines, one striking aspect of the assemblage is the variety of knife handle types reserved for specific types of end blade. Mary-Rousselière provides informative details about how Dorset people were hafting their blades, information that rarely survives. In N73, the house with the best preservation of all, Mary-Rousselière describes up to 12 types of knife handle, represented by specimens that retained their hafted blade and lashing. These end blades, still in position in their tool, led him to warn against functional or typological attributions that would be too specific, as in the case of blades used as knives that have been classified as projectile points in other sites.

It is unfortunate that Mary-Rousselière's detailed descriptions are not more precisely illustrated. One learns in the preface that he had provided recommendations on how plates should illustrate his text, but publication cost and the unavailability of some of the best objects of the collections (due to the travelling exhibit "Lost Visions, Forgotten Dreams") had prevented the editors from following his instructions. One cannot help but regret that Mary-Rousselière's last publication wish could not be fulfilled as the plates do not present the full richness of the collections and tend to be disconnected from the text.

The book ends with a postface by Patricia Sutherland, where she revisits the collections and exposes her preliminary reflections on what she interprets as evidence of extensive contact between Dorset and Norse groups in the Eastern Arctic (see also Sutherland 2000). Her attention focuses on the thread made of fur, on artifacts she calls "unusual wood objects," and on the dating of these artifacts and by extension of the house structures. Sutherland discusses the thread without referring to the analysis reported in Appendix I. Mary-Rousselière was impressed enough by the thread that he had it sent to the Judicial Laboratory of the Canadian Royal Mounted Police where it was analyzed by G.R. Carroll (B.Sc., C/M,i/c Hair & Fiber Section). The fiber specialist concluded that the making of the thread (a combination of S and Z twists) was comparable to modern thread making (Appendix I: p. 100; see also Fitzhugh et al. [2006] for a detailed description in making similar cordage). Sutherland explains that the resemblance of the thread to that found on Norse sites in Greenland caused her to ask Penelope Walton-Rogers, a "textile analyst," to re-analyze the thread. The latter concluded the thread had been spun and plied. Her report, however, is not reproduced and the reader cannot compare the language used by both specialists and the basis of their analysis. Regarding the fur itself, Carroll reported that "The twine fragment is composed of animal hair, the majority of which are underfur and not diagnostically useful for identifications. The few guard hair fragments which are present are *Leporidae* (rabbit family)" (p. 100). This had led Mary-Rousselière to conclude the thread had been made with fur of local Arctic hare. Sutherland, for her part, reports that Walton-Rogers identified the thread as "[...] made from Arctic hare fur, with a few stray hairs attached to it which were almost certainly goat" (p. 115). Curiously, the discrepancy between the two reports is not discussed and the first one is simply dismissed. The questions that arise however are why specialists would be in such disagreement, how accurate are hair specialists in their identification, and how trustworthy is the Canadian Royal Mounted Police?

According to Mary-Rousselière the intriguing thread was found in a relatively secure middle Dorset component of the long occupied N73 house (pp. 67-69). Sutherland undertook the re-dating of the thread (p. 118) and reports that while the new AMS dates bring the main occupation of N73 to a slightly later period "between the 7th and 8th centuries" AD, the date is still too early for Norse contact. Sutherland renewed interest for Nunguvik has led her to rediscover similar cordage from other well-preserved middle Dorset contexts. As she reports, these re-discoveries bring new interrogation and provide new insight into Dorset culture.

A lot could be written about the topic of Norse-Dorset cultural and technological interaction and the debate is ongoing (Fitzhugh et al. 2006; Park 2008). A last comment on wood technology is however needed. Sutherland states that:

N73 assemblage included numerous artifacts, mostly made from wood, which were outside the range of style and technique associated with other Palaeo-Eskimo assemblages [...] [including] artifacts displaying techniques, such as mortising, which occur in mediaeval European assemblages (Planche 13c); artifacts of unknown function which show some resemblance to those recovered from Norse contexts (Planche 15b, c, d, i, k) [...] (p. 115-116)

It would have been helpful to provide here specific references to enable the reader to compare Dorset and Norse wood remains. We know from the Ipiutak assemblage at Deering, that mortising is not a technique restricted to Mediaeval Europe. In fact, it is one of the basic ways by which two pieces of wood can be joined and it is found in various technological traditions. Given the physical properties of wood, wood working technologies share many principles and different wood working traditions often show striking convergences. A detailed analysis of the wood and of the tools used to work wood by both the Norse and the Dorset is thus needed. What is remarkable about the wood assemblage at Nunguvik and Saatut is that it provides new opportunities to explore and understand Dorset wood working tradition and the extent of their technological knowledge and skills. As mentioned by Sutherland, the abundance of wood at Dorset sites in the region raises questions of availability, procurement methods and by extension environmental conditions.

Nunguvik et Saatut is an important contribution to the field of Arctic prehistory. As stressed by Mary-Rousselière and Sutherland alike, these sites are among the most important sites of the Eastern Arctic, and the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the editors are to be praised for publishing this manuscript. Finally though, as a French speaker, I would be remiss not to mention the errors in spelling and syntax in the French preface. There was an unfortunate lack of attention evident even in the title with its spelling “Paleo-eskimaux,” a hybrid of the French *Esquimaux* and the international spelling “Eskimo.”

Conclusion

The publication of the three manuscripts reviewed in this essay is highly commendable. Although covering a vast time period, greatly different geographical locations within the Arctic/Subarctic region, and different topics, they share an underlying theme that present images and descriptions reflecting the importance wood has played in the life of historic and prehistoric Inuit societies. These books also show the importance of editing and publishing important original manuscripts that might otherwise still be sitting at the bottom of a museum or archive drawer, to make them

available to the anthropological community. These texts are reference books for anyone interested in ways of life in Arctic and Subarctic regions.

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